UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1999/135
30 March 1999

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 9

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Letter dated 24 March 1999 from the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I would refer to your meeting with Mr. Martin Palouš, the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, during which Mr. Palouš presented to you the Czech position and new approach to human rights and transmitted to you the personal letter of President Václav Havel.

In this connection, I would like to ask you kindly to circulate this letter* as an official document of the Commission.

(Signed) Miroslav Somol
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* The annex is reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.

GE.99-11763 (E)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ANNEX

Prague, 23 March 1999

Dear Madam,

Allow me to inform you about an initiative that the Czech Republic intends to introduce in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Feeling a lasting respect and admiration for your activities in the field of international politics, as well as for your personal integrity, I am gratified to be able to turn to you, Madam High Commissioner, in this important matter.

The initiative envisages putting forward a resolution on the present human rights situation in Cuba.

As you will remember, open criticism in the Commission of the dismal state of human rights and civil liberties in that country has until now been coming from the United States. Last year's failure of the American resolution indicated that it was time for other members of the democratic community also to address themselves to this compelling issue. We have decided to undertake this task, being convinced that such course of action fully corresponds with our concept of indivisibility of human rights and responsibility for defending them in any part of the world.

In the case of Cuba, our feeling of responsibility is all the stronger in view of our close acquaintance with that country, dating from the period of our previous political regime when thousands of Czechs became familiar with the Cuban situation. Both of our nations encountered similar political fates: our own country used to suffer the multiple adverse effects of the same ideology that is still advanced by the Government of Cuba. Having directly experienced the impact of that ideology and the resulting suppression of human rights, we remember very well how important it was to us in those times when that policy was criticized by the free world. We thus know that by voicing open criticism of the undemocratic conditions in Cuba, we encourage all the brave Cubans who endure persecution and years of prison for their loyalty to the ideals of freedom and human dignity. At present, we are seeing intensified repression of the advocates of freedom in Cuba; the expectations of a gradual progress toward more democracy, associated with last year's visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the island, are obviously not being fulfilled. This adds to the reasons that prompt us to launch this initiative before the United Nations Commission of Human Rights. We have good reason to believe that other countries will join us in this undertaking.

It may be that this initiative will not be correctly understood, or favourably received, by everyone. We are aware of that. We realize that, for a number of reasons, some countries give priority to other categories of values and may consider our criticism of Cuba to be excessive or far-fetched. But we are not willing to compromise with the principle that human rights are indivisible. Our own historical experience impels us to be firm on this point. We are prepare to take the risks involved in initiating such a step before an international organization; all the more, however, do we expect support on the part of those countries with which we share the set of democratic values.

The proposed resolution is not meant just to criticize, or even to utter threats of sanctions. Our intention is to express also a readiness of the democratic community to lend Cuba a helping hand in its difficult situation and to support all steps indicating a will to introduce more democracy in the country.

Only the voting result will show to what extent we will have succeeded in our intentions. Whatever the outcome, our conviction that this step is the right thing will remain unchanged. We can imagine ourselves in the position of those whose cause we are advocating. Our own past history supplies ample evidence that far too often the roles of the defenders and the defended can be reversed.

I trust, Madam High Commissioner, that you will understand the reasons that lead us to undertake this initiative.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed V. Havel)

Her Excellency
Mary Robinson
High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations
Palais des Nations
Geneva